

Skagit Watershed Council

Technical Work Group (TWG) Final Meeting Notes

January 19, 2017, 1:00 – 4:00PM, SWC Office, Mount Vernon

(* indicates action item; indicates decision)

Attendance: Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Bob Warinner, temporary Chair (WDFW), Doug Bruland (PSE), Kari Odden (SLT), Erin Lowery (SCL), Ed Connor (SCL), Devin Smith (SRSC), Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Rick Hartson (USIT), Tom Slocum (SCD)

Guests: Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Steve Hinton (SRSC), Nathan Rice (Kulshan Services)

Meeting called to order at 1:00 pm by temporary chair Bob Warinner.

Draft meeting agenda approved. November meeting notes approved.

SWC Committee Reports

Board of Directors - Richard Brocksmith

The Board discussed the community engagement program and the upcoming lead entity grant round.

Community Engagement Committee – Richard Brocksmith

The committee has been working hard on social media, including the Facebook page, photo contest, and existing efforts like Illuminight on the Skagit Riverwalk. The Board is looking at their recommendation to do interviews and blogs. The committee is also working on the Skagit Youth Educators Retreat, partnering with NCI, SFEG, and others to look at how youth education is happening in Skagit. There is a lot going on and people are working together. The committee will meet first week of February.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management Subcommittee - Richard Brocksmith

The committee is focusing on having resources so that people can collect data on existing indicators. SWC has also worked on riparian area indicators. A scope of work has been developed to have Abby Hook facilitate working with leads to get comprehensive reports from them. She would summarize the status and trends in the data among those indicators. The committee can review this to see if hypotheses and methods hold up, or if changes are needed. \$9000 would carry us through the end of this biennium. Board will consider this the first week of February.

One member commented that having a facilitator makes a lot of sense since the committee doesn't meet very often.

TWG recommends approval of Abby Hook Scope of Work

Protection Committee – Bob Warinner

The committee is focusing on the Protection Strategy update. They are in the process of appraising and closing on properties that have already been greenlighted, but there are no new greenlighted projects.

Review 2017 SWC Meeting Dates

Meeting dates were approved.

***There was a recommendation to send out MS Outlook invites for TWG meetings.**

Review of Protection Strategy Update work by Protection Subcommittee – Chris Vondrasek

Chris finished the mainstem assessment of 3387 available non-public, non-protected parcels. The top 33% of parcels would be greenlighted (1129 parcels). On aggregate, tributary parcels scored higher than mainstem parcels, meaning the line for the top 33% was 1.901 for the 65 tributary parcels in the top 1/3, and 1.001 for the 1129 mainstem parcels in the top 1/3. Parcels were scored with similar methodology assessing their areas of reach-level aquatic habitat and floodplain forest habitats. Both groups of parcels were also assessed for connectivity. ***One question for TWG to consider is whether these two assessments should remain separate or if they should be done together.**

Chris reaffirmed that the method has been developed over time with the participation of the Protection Subcommittee and the TWG, but that this is the first review of the results for the whole watershed. Concerns can be addressed as we refine the method. We may not actually protect all of the parcels the model recommends.

A major point to consider is the way the model focuses on the amount of habitat per acres. Larger parcels will have a higher hurdle to get over. Forty-acre parcels with just a little bit of good habitat may not make the cut off. This puts a higher emphasis on habitat density and connectivity than the old method. Are these differences good or not? That's what we need to discuss. We may need to tweak the dials on the habitat metrics, or not.

Big picture: All of Cockreham Island is essentially off limits due to its isolation. Day Creek parcels make sense to greenlight given their connectivity and function. At first blush, it makes sense at the watershed scale level.

Discussion:

- How do these results align with the old methodology?
 - o They haven't been compared closely other than some basic QA/QC.
- Since mainstem habitats are larger and generally prioritized, it seems counterintuitive that on aggregate the tributary parcels scored higher than mainstem parcels.
 - o The ratio of good habitat to the size of the parcel can be more plainly seen now. In tribs, you don't get many large parcels but they often have a high ratio of habitat to total area. Tribs also have little isolation and little agricultural clearing,

and few hydromodifications. Trib parcels are scoring higher because they have better habitat conditions.

- The connectivity bump reorders parcels between 33% and 50% to create a group of the best 3rd of these parcels. The group looked at a parcel, which doesn't qualify in the top 33% on its own, but with connectivity it gets bumped up and greenlighted.
 - o SLT wouldn't want to acquire the part of the parcel across the road. Protection Committee may need to look at some parcels again.
- What happens to your base map and numbers if you turn off the riparian filter and just look at everything in the floodplain? Treating riparian with one score doesn't reflect how variable the floodplain connectivity can be, and could exclude important parcels.
 - o They are not counted if they're not connected, and they're discounted 50% to begin with. There are currently 12 gradations of riparian quality.
- It's still not created equal. We are trying to make decisions about precious resources. Is the added riparian buffer band width really contributing much to this tool? Steve Hinton asked, can we look at the results of the model without the riparian buffer and see how it affects which parcels make the cut?
 - o That's a reasonable request, but can Steve provide some science on why that's important?
 - o Acquisitions are property by property – there is added complexity when you actually have to acquire property. What does it look like on the ground, and what will Protection Strategy think?
 - o Some sponsors receive block grants, which is unique and it's not a given. This is a tool that justifies giving out block grants so if we can't agree on it, block grants don't happen. It doesn't cut the mustard to say trust us.
 - o ***Chris could look at all the scores and look at how much the riparian bump is.** We need to be sure this is worth doing before we take the time to do that. The original Protection Strategy said we need to look at long term processes over geologic time so let's consider that as well. TWG should seriously consider what we are asking Chris to do, because it could be significant.
 - o Chris Vondrasek: Part of considering the riparian buffer came because promising acquisitions were frustrated in the past by having to consider habitats near the rivers without a way to value more of the terrestrial areas in the whole parcel. Bob Warinner: This is just a presentation of the first results, not a defense.
 - o We are talking past each other. Riparian function is those processes that are acting on channels that are actively engaged in the floodplain. A buffer on the edge of the floodplain is different. Steve Hinton: I'm asking that they are not treated the same. Riparian buffers on old channels were scored appropriately in

the old method. There's a 50% discount to all riparian parcels over floodplain parcels. Some riparian buffers differ a lot in function. ***Maybe there could be a sliding scale in terms of distance from channels, instead of just a 50% discount.**

- When it comes to purchasing and protecting, how many of these parcels will be linked together? How do you re-rate them when you have to buy multiple parcels together?
 - o This is a landscape filtering tool. You could average those scores. Those project-scale analyses we can't address at this landscape scale.
- Tom Slocum: It's an interesting exercise. You want some kind of strategic, non-arbitrary way to assess these parcels. This passes muster.
- Someone noticed that some little parcels are green and others that look the same are red. Maybe that's just bug-checking.
 - o ***Chris will review. He says send him parcel numbers that you'd like him to check.**
- ***Also, Chris will look at why there appear to be a few parcels in the middle of the river that score in the lowest 1/3 of habitat.**
- Usually very few piano key parcels pass muster – why do these? Reaches have a percentage of connectivity score, not just adjacency score. Are these small parcels strategically important? Be careful since they could be more expensive per acre. This is a real difference from past analyses. Cape Horn as well. We want to make sure we aren't solving old problems and causing new ones. The previous formula would reject these because of cost.
 - o Conservation organizations don't want to own those properties anyway because they are too expensive. Just because it's green doesn't mean anyone will acquire it. There's a practical element. The size per effort is too much. ***Chris will identify areas with "piano keys" before the February 6th meeting of the Protection Subcommittee, and the Subcommittee will discuss where, whether, and how to delete them from consideration.**
- Devin: The scores for tribbs seem too extreme. It's still strange that tribbs are getting scored so much higher than mainstem parcels.
- Tom Slocum: Is there some way to test this by looking 50 years in the future and where development will be to address future threats? There is a step in the process that can give a parcel a bump if it's in imminent threat of development. SWC has taken a look at this but existing models didn't fit this area well. More can be done with that in the future.

Next steps

It was recommended that the Protection Subcommittee discuss these areas of concern. Then TWG can take another look at it. Meanwhile, we can have a more organic review process. Some folks requested time to review it on own time. Some TWG members would like to review a methodology report.

***Review process: Protection Strategy will produce reviewable materials so TWG can review it again. There will be an organized review period with a deadline.**

***Add additional shapefiles to explain the ratings in the webmap.**

Review proposals for the use of returned PSAR funds

Some projects came in under budget so there is some extra funding. Five complete proposals were submitted in just a week, as well as a couple of late proposals that we may want to consider. Richard briefly described the proposals. They are: the Skagit Land Trust Big Lake dock removal and invasives control, (2 parts of the Lake Creek Wetland Complex Protection #15-1172A), two SFEG riparian projects (Skagit BasinRiparian 2b #15-1614 and Collaborative Riparian Stewardship #16-1650), and SRSC Barnaby Reach project (the Barnaby Reach Preliminary Restoration design #14-1255).

Devin explained the Barnaby project. SRSC needs to spend more money on topography and hydrology because they've been asked to do it at a larger scale to address broader project goals. It's not a change of scope, but it is more than was expected. This project started out as a question of how to restore aging infrastructure, then it evolved to a reach-level project, which created more public comment. Without the extra effort, the original project will struggle given landowner concerns, so funds will help make it happen. This funding is pretty essential for the project to move forward.

SLT has acquired Lake Creek parcels on Big Lake. They submitted 2 proposals for stewardship, particularly invasive species (yellow flag iris) treatments and to remove a dock on the property in Big Lake. Estimates for the dock removal have been more than anticipated. Invasive removal can happen within timeline, but dock removal can't. Removing a few planks and letting it rot probably will not be an adequate solution for habitat, or their responsibility as the property owners as far as public safety. But the consensus of the TWG is they should be able to remove the dock for \$50,000 requested, or less.

Skagit County Martin Road planting site maintenance could use some extra money.

Some of these projects are eligible for a cost increase through PSAR. Is there a four-year limit?

More information was requested on the Lake Creek project.

After some discussion, TWG voted to only recommend the five complete proposals submitted on time. ***If additional funds are available, TWG will consider the additional two incomplete projects.**

Lead Entity Program Guide

Comments received in August and September 2016 were addressed via track changes and distributed for review. The only new comments received were from SRSC.

Concern about SRFB review comments being captured twice. TWG will keep those review comments internal.

Are we including more frequent reporting? During feasibility design, should we require stakeholder feedback? SRFB already requires a stakeholder consultation in feasibility design. There was concern about whether stakeholder review is actually part of the feasibility process – how to define stakeholders? A funded project must have a stakeholder review process, that's what's in the guide.

Concern about timelines and deliverables being met and ability to track all available documents. A checklist of requirements has been developed for better communication with sponsor. It won't be perfect since this is the first year, but we will try it out and see how to improve it over time.

Concern about unvetted technical info brought forward late in the process, especially after the TRC scoring and first at the LECC meetings. Devin Smith asked about how we might limit request for late changes from LECC.

All comments that require a response are critical comments. There was a reiteration that "critical comments" were from the TRC, not the LECC, at least during the site visit phase. There's a distinction between constructive and critical comments. It should be proponent's choice to address constructive comments. Be clear about what's a critical comment that must be addressed.

LECC met twice and there were comments with conditions on projects in the end. How could this be avoided in the future? LECC should give a list of comments at first meeting and make it more clear between constructive / critical comments.

Devin: I'd rather see the guide unchanged. The fix is worse than the crime. More comments and documentation is too much.

We should compartmentalize the program. TRC comments are critical or constructive. LECC comments are helpful in the field. What TWG doesn't support is that LECC members decide they have a "critical comment" in the second meeting. should rank projects, not comment on them.

***Steve wanted changes to Appendix D for LECC guidelines. He will work with Board to do that?**

TWG discussed Steve's comments about removing the requirement to include in the project proposals a "benefit to fish number" since numbers are so subjective and unscientific. The group agreed. TWG supported removing the requirement for fish numbers in projects.

What criteria do we have for evaluating cost effectiveness of projects over \$1 million?

Third party review? Bonus points with Third party review. Steve felt this should be strengthened. There is cost inflation by consultants across the board.

3rd party review is also expensive. Need to talk more about this.

The Board would like the TWG to think about how to update the 4ywp, though Puget Sound Partnership is currently reconsidering timing of this request for next year.

***TWG will revisit SRSC comments at the next meeting if they can't be addressed before then.**

Adjourned 4:21.